

By Ryan Riggs

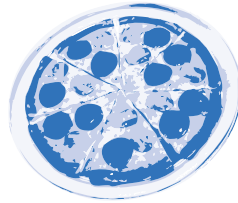
Education and Eats: Anything but Anchovies

Colleges Visited

Harvard University (MA)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MA)
Boston University (MA)
Boston College (MA)
Dartmouth University (NH)
Yale University (CT)
Columbia University (NY)
New York University (NY)
United States Military Academy at West Point (NY)
Princeton University (NJ)
University of Pennsylvania

Pizza Restaurants Visited

Cambridge 1—Cambridge, MA
Cinderella's—Cambridge, MA
EBA's—Hanover, NH
Sally's—New Haven, CT
Koronet's—New York, NY
Iano's—Princeton, NJ
Pat's King of Steaks—Philadelphia, PA



Is there anything that screams “College!” more than the local pizza joint? You know the place: the old wood booths and tables, sports memorabilia on the walls, faded pictures of generations of students, stains on the worn tile floors, discs of dough twirling through the air, and that lovely huge old charred oven churning out pizza after pizza to appreciative college students. There’s usually a jukebox in the corner playing everything from Sinatra classics to Springsteen, REM and U2 to current campus hits such as the Black Kids or Death Cab for Cutie. The place is always crowded with students, townies, professors, and local families who appreciate good handmade pizza, not the generic national chain delivery. Not too many tourists frequent these places, although occasionally you will find the current high school senior or prospective student visiting the school with mom and dad. Mom and dad of course reminisce about their college days at the local pizza joint, and the cycle begins anew.

As a high school college counselor, I have been on too many campus tours and sat in on too many information sessions to keep count. Honestly, they all tend to morph together. All good colleges have passionate, engaged students immersed in learning, intramural sports, undergraduate research, small classes, financial aid, opportunities for faith, study abroad, and diversity. What always stands out, however, are the many wonderful restaurants I visit on my trips. This past summer I visited colleges in New England and based many of my meals around the local college town pizza place. I also had some parameters to follow regarding pizza selection. First, the pizza had to be recommended by a local, preferably a student. Second, the restaurant had to be within walking distance to campus (within reason). Finally, no chains.

I began my college tour in Boston, a city not very famous for pizza (begin arguments here). Only one mile separates Harvard Square and Central Square on

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the map, yet they are worlds apart culturally, historically and gastronomically. In Harvard Square, Cambridge 1, which used to house the Cambridge Fire Department, was relatively new but still served a good pie. The crust was thin and crisp, and had obviously come from a charcoal-fired oven. Although the pizza had only a tiny bit of tomato sauce, the sausage had a bit of a spicy kick at the end. Cambridge 1 also had an attentive and friendly wait staff that night. This place was a little chi-chi for my tastes though—I should have been suspicious that pizza with arugula lettuce and Maine lobster was on the menu—I was looking for down home, old school, cheese-dripping slices. The clientele here was not singing along with “Sweet Caroline” during Red Sox games, but instead debating whether cabernet or chardonnay goes better with pizza. Despite this initial disappointment, Cambridge 1 was a good start to my trip, but I could not place just why I thought it was good. It was a little bit like Harvard itself: was it good because it was supposed to be good, or was it good in and of itself? Of course Harvard is an excellent school, but why? I’ll leave that zen-like question to the experts, like those guys at *Newsweek* or *U.S. News and World Report*.

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The pizza at Cinderella’s in Central Square looked wonderful: high toasty crusts, lots of sausage and pepperoni, and thick red sauce under a layer of melted mozzarella cheese. From the sidewalk in front of Cinderella’s I could see one of the domes from nearby MIT. Truly this would be an enchanted pizza. Unfortunately, just like Cinderella’s ball gown and footmen, it was just for show. This pizza turned into a pumpkin at first bite. It just did not have much flavor. I had to pile it high with Parmesan cheese to give it some uumph. The pizza here was exactly the opposite of MIT itself. From the outside, MIT is not much to look at. Neoclassical columns clash with flat out odd looking buildings all over campus, as if the MIT master planners jumbled sets of college campuses together just for kicks. However, on the inside: Wow! Just walking down the halls at MIT gave me goosebumps. Where else will you find stenciled on a plain office door “Dr. Noam Chomsky – Linguistics.” The lecture hall where I heard the admission information session still had the original ampmeters and voltmeters from 1933, alongside a full digital package/DVD/laptop/projector hookup. The student union has a full grocery, not just a 7-11, complete with fresh fruit and a salad bar. The kids here are smart, but not showy, and eager to tell passing strangers about the MIT experience. I got the

sense they defined college cool in Boston, but behind the scenes. Even the Boston police use special MIT-named measurements (smoots) on the Mass Avenue bridge crossing the Charles to denote where accidents happen.

Having visited Boston University (BU) and Boston College (BC) before, my assumption is that there would be more opportunity for good pizza at BU. It’s a city school, after all. Hundreds of little shops and stores line Commonwealth Avenue across from campus next to the high-rise dorms. It has that city vibe, the hustle and bustle and flow of the crowded streets and trams going by, especially in September and October during tight pennant races at Fenway Park just about a half-mile away. Hop on the green line tram, though, and take it all the way to the last stop and another world: Boston College. Chestnut Hill is country compared to Brookline’s city. BC has the traditional collegiate gothic architecture, the stone walls, ivy, green grass, and of course a beautiful football stadium. BC also has the Jesuit philosophy running through the entire campus. BC strives to integrate into all areas of education the Jesuit ideals of academics with service to others. I have met BC students who attend Mass daily, and some who never went to Mass the whole four years they were there. The students say that BC is “as Catholic as you want it to be.” Un-

fortunately I didn’t make it to any pizza restaurants close to either campus so I continued north.

EBA’s, in Hanover, NH, advertises anything but anchovies and they live up to their promise. From egg rolls to fish and chips to quesadillas to chicken alfredo, EBA’s is much more than pizza. If the dining halls at Dartmouth are not serving what students want, EBA’s makes up the difference. Dartmouth sports memorabilia hangs all over the walls, with crew, basketball and football dominating the rooms. The college town feel was obvious as I sat outside and soaked in the pleasant June day before my information session and tour. Main Street in Hanover reminded me of Harvard Square but without all the tourists. Unfortunately, I didn’t see a single person pass by in a sweatshirt that read “College” on the front. After all, the Alpha Delta Pi house at Dartmouth is the place where *Animal House* was based and 60 percent of eligible students are members of a greek-letter organization.

Something was lost in translation at EBA’s between “I’ll be outside waiting” and “I’ll come back for pick up later.” It must have been my deep Southern accent which is utterly foreign in rural New Hampshire. To make up for their mistake (I waited patiently for more than 40 minutes), EBA’s threw in two huge free chocolate chip cookies. The pizza

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was actually pretty good, but I had to scarf it down fast enough to make the Dartmouth info session, so I really did not get to enjoy it.

Despite my tour guide downplaying every aspect of Dartmouth's greek system, I still got the feeling that it is a major player on campus. Dartmouth's relative isolation and freezing cold winters help to foster a sense of academic community that is sometimes lacking on other college campuses. It is a place where the conservative Christian and the avowed atheist can have a decent discussion, not an argument. As much as I enjoyed my time in Hanover, I was ready to eat some well-known pizza on the coast.

Arguably the most famous of the Ivy League pizza parlors is Sally's (I mean Pepe's) in New Haven, CT. Yalies around the world have taken sides between Sally's and Pepe's and their long-standing, time-honored rivalry. As I had only one night in New Haven, and my brother is a Sally's man, I had no choice. Getting inside after about 20 minutes, I marveled at all of the newspaper articles, press clippings, photos, Doonesbury cartoons, and magazine covers that referenced Sally's. Ted Kennedy's and Frank Sinatra's pictures were on the wall, as were most of Sally's family (family-owned since 1938). The tables were crowded with a variety of people having fun: the young couple with a small child, the giggly girls celebrating a sweet 16 party, the reunion bunch downing beers by the bottle and pizza

by the slice. The special at Sally's is a pizza with cheese, clams, olive oil, and nothing else. I gulped. Clams on pizza were one thing, but no sauce? What was this? A Maricopa County, Arizona prison? The pie arrived with the crust just a little burnt, and I was intrigued. It first passed the visual, then the smell test. Getting better. First bite—wow, what flavor! I admit, no sauce took some getting used to, but after the first slice or so, I was hooked. The cheese was tangy enough, but never overpowered the clams. The olive oil on the crust gave it just a little hint of fried character, but not too much. It was a pleasant surprise to savor as I began my tour.

My tour guide at Yale stressed the unique characteristics of her college, and seldom, if ever, mentioned office hours, blue lights for safety, study abroad options, and small classes. Clams on pizza were one thing, but a tour guide focusing on information I was interested in? This was equally refreshing. She stressed the residential college system, and how each one is a microcosm of the larger Yale University. Each residential college houses 400–500 students, and students live there on campus during their time at Yale. This system gives students a real community feeling in the middle of urban New Haven.

I had not visited New York City in over 10 years—too long. Arriving at Grand Central Station on a commuter train and walking through the lobby to get to the subway entrance is an experience every

American should have. This American icon smelled like New York. It sounded like New York. It just felt good. I made my way up Manhattan on the red line to the subway stop by Columbia at 116th and Broadway.

Imagine my satisfaction when I came across this pleasant neighborhood in Manhattan named Columbia. Sure, I was in the middle of New York City, but felt worlds away in the rectangle that comprises the Columbia campus. Ironically, Columbia felt more isolated and remote than both Harvard and Yale. It must have something to do with the green space and iron gates. I felt even farther away in the underground labyrinth that is the student fitness center. It just keeps going down and down and down. Perhaps that's what students mean when they say they are getting to the "core curriculum." Seriously, the core curriculum connects Columbia students from start to finish. They all take some of the same classes. They read the same books. Having a common bond cementing students beginning freshman year helps everyone feel closer in a city that has the potential to make students

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No other school in a large American city is as deeply ingrained in its surroundings as NYU. There is no middle ground here. Students either love it or hate it. The ones who take advantage of what the school and city offer thrive. Students who are expecting college and city life to come knocking on their dorm room door and drag them out fail.

feel isolated. Columbia also guarantees all undergraduate students four years of housing. Not bad, even if rents on the Upper West Side have dropped recently.

Several Columbia students told me about Koronet's pizza at 110th and Broadway, and how it was perfect for a college student in NYC. Koronet's has a reputation for quantity over quality, and it certainly lived up to it. For five bucks, I received a huge slice of cheese pizza and a Coke. I thought I could not even buy a cup of ice in NYC for five bucks, and there I was getting a huge lunch. Unfortunately, the pizza was worth only one buck. The size of the slice was inversely proportional to the taste. The crust was good, though—just a little bit chewy and undercooked. Koronet's is fantastic if you are on a very limited budget, or it is late at night, or you just can't find anywhere else to eat. Otherwise, I am sure there is better pizza in the city. However, I did have a great time just sitting on one of the benches in the tiny green space in the median running down Broadway, soaking in the atmosphere eating my lunch. It could have been the best or the worst food ever, and I still would have enjoyed it equally just based on the setting.

As I rode down to NYU from Columbia a Mexican mariachi band played on the subway. Only in New York! NYU—the university of the other_____. You fill in the blank. Race, religion, ethnicity, nationality—whatever you can think

of—NYU has it in droves. With 20,000 undergraduate students and 30,000 more grad students and continuing ed folks, NYU has plenty of the other to go around. Add the funkiness of Greenwich Village and Washington Square Park to the mix, and you have the so-called melting pot of the college experience. From the ninth floor lounge in the Kimmel Center in the heart of NYU's campus, students look directly down Fifth Avenue past the Washington Square arch to the Empire State and Chrysler buildings in the (not too far) distance. No other school in a large American city is as deeply ingrained in its surroundings as NYU. There is no middle ground here. Students either love it or hate it. The ones who take advantage of what the school and city offer thrive. Students who are expecting college and city life to come knocking on their dorm room door and drag them out fail. In such a city, students must navigate through the overwhelming experiences and endless choices (even the sometimes bad pizza)

thrown at them. But both Columbia and NYU offer students a break and the quality of an enriched education amidst the chaos of the city.

I must have hit Iano's pizza in Princeton, NJ on a bad night. I could not order a fresh pie because they were almost closing (8:45 on a Thursday night in June). I bought two slices from the warming cabinet that were dry with very little sauce. To add insult to injury, the toppings were tired and the crust was so tough I confused it with salt water taffy. Finally, there was nothing about Princeton in the whole restaurant. Not a pennant, not a picture, not a postcard—zero.

There's a reason why Princeton is routinely at the top of the rankings every year. Cynics will tell you that rankings mean nothing, and usually I agree. However, sitting in the lecture hall where Albert Einstein held his class lent just a little bit of credence to the rankings. It's hard not to soak up the rich history while staying at the same hotel where John Forbes Nash had a nightly drink at the Yankee Doodle Tap Room or seeing memorabilia from one of the very first college football games in 1869. Yes, Princeton seemingly has it all: a beautiful setting, historical buildings, intelligent students and faculty, and generous alumni. For me all it lacked was a good pizza place.

By the time I rolled into Philly near the end of my trip, I was done with pizza. Too much sausage, too much cheese, too

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If I can tell a high school junior where to find a good pizza or some BBQ at any school from Auburn to Yale (sorry Alabama and Zane State), then I have helped that student immediately find a friendly spot near campus. Sometimes a student's interaction with the college culture and environment is just as important as academics when searching for the right fit. On a four-state, six-college tour, a friendly spot provides plenty of comfort for mom, dad and junior.

much tomato sauce. I needed a change. Luckily, I was in a city not known for its pizza, but for its cheesesteaks. Asking a random sample of Penn students along Locust Walk which place they preferred, Pat's or Geno's, the split was 50-50. I decided to let my gut take over. When I stepped out of the cab I knew it immediately: Pat's King of Steaks. I am not a flashy guy—Geno's may serve wonderful cheesesteaks, but the garish neon lights turned me right to Pat's. Pat's is understated, nondescript, even a little rundown: perfect! Plus, they have a plaque memorializing where Sly Stallone stood in *Rocky* and ordered a sandwich. You can't beat that. The food here is not fancy. You get a huge steak sandwich—all you have to decide is the extras. I had mine "wit whiz," meaning with cheese whiz and grilled onions. Not cheese whiz from a can, but real cheese just melted and dripped over the meat. After an hour savoring my dinner and talking to other customers, I waddled back to a cab, satisfied.

I am a sucker for the Locust Walk at Penn. Just as cheesesteak was a nice change from pizza, the Locust Walk offers a tranquility not found in the middle of many other urban campuses. I grew up in Memphis, where to get anywhere in the city you take Poplar Avenue. In Memphis, all directions begin with, "First take Poplar to ____ (fill in the blank)." At Penn, Locust Walk is Poplar Avenue. It stretches the length of the school from those high rise dorms in the east to those low rise classrooms in the west. Almost every academic building is on one side or the other of Locust Walk, making classes easy to find. The "Addams Family Building" is a local highlight.

On my way home, after I completed yet another round of college tours, I realized I have lost track of exactly how many colleges I have visited in the last five years. Sure, I could go back and figure it out, but what's the point? What's best for my students is that I

help them make a connection at a specific school, and if that connection involves food, well then, perfect. Is taste really linked to memory? For me, the surprising taste of clam pizza or even enjoying a bad NYC slice in a perfect setting can bring back memories of a particular campus experience—the reason I go on these visits in the first place. If I can tell a high school junior where to find a good pizza or some BBQ at any school from Auburn to Yale (sorry Alabama and Zane State), then I have helped that student immediately find a friendly spot near campus. Sometimes a student's interaction with the college culture and environment is just as important as academics when searching for the right fit. On a four-state, six-college tour, a friendly spot provides plenty of comfort for mom, dad and junior.

So, where should I go next? Email me ideas at riggsr@episcopalhigh.org



RYAN RIGGS is the director of college counseling at Episcopal High School in Jacksonville, FL. Growing up in Memphis, his favorite pizza was from Garibaldi's. He attended the University of Virginia, and has also lived in Richmond, where he often had Superstars Pizza. His current favorites are Pizza Palace, Blue Moon, and Al's Pizza.